the dhows leave the banks. These men wander through the fleet in their own boats (usually launches) always trying to get to a first quality pearl before the other brokers hear of it, and always hoping that the *nakhoda* will not recognize its value. The broker's paraphenalia consists of a magnifying glass, a small hand balance, weights, and a set of brass screens for grading the pearls. When pearls are sold on the banks they are ceremoniously transferred from the captain's red bunting to the broker's.

Regardless of where they are sold, the majority of the pearls go to Bombay, and from Bombay eventually to Paris, the world's pearl emporium. Pearls are usually shipped to Bombay by air. The reason is simple: Usury and insurance are prohibited by the Quran. If the pearls were shipped to India by Arab dhow or steamer through an Arab agent, there could be no insurance on the consignment. However, if the pearls are shipped via Trans World Airline or British Overseas Airlines Corporation, the pearls can be heavily insured. Thus, the Arabs use a Western agency to get around the Quranic prohibition. In Bombay, Indian workers skillfully pierce the pearls with fine bow-driven drills and string them on silk, graded according to color and size. The pearls are sold to European dealers in bunches consisting of a number of strings and generally known as "Bombay bunches."

When the season has ended and the pearls are sold, the captain deducts the cost of the food and provisions. What is left represents the profit. Of this the owner of the dhow gets one-half; of the remainder each diver and each attendant gets one share and the captain two. Most of the dhows leaving Saudi Arabian ports are small (not over 40 feet) with small crews—usually something like 6 divers, 4 attendants, and a captain. Thus, each diver and attendant would get one twenty-fourth (about 4 percent) of the profits, and the captain would get one twelfth (about 8 percent). The pearling dhows operating out of Bahrein and Kuwait are generally much larger than the Saudi Arabian dhows, and may have crews of 40 or more. The profits of these craft are split in much the same way as the profits on smaller dhows, but the captain gets more shares with these larger crews than he does with the smaller.

A: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arab MK2

ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS

228 426 Pearling is a great gamble for everyone concerned. A share may be worth only 50 or 100 rupees if the take has been poor, but on the average a share should net at least several hundred rupees. It must be remembered that a share usually represents a year's earning, since the pearling industry operates on the "debt system." This is not to be confused with the "truck system," for the workers in the Persian Gulf pearl fisheries are not paid in produce. In the debt system the divers and tenders get actual cash advances during the seasons they are out of work, and their families get food and supplies while they dive. They must pay off their incurred debts with their earnings after the pearling season, but somehow they never seem able to get free.

228 426 672 Until recently, a diver who accepted cash advances from a *nakhoda* had doomed himself to diving until death, and unfortunately death might not be an exit, as his debt was simply passed on to his son or brother, who then went on to incur his own debt. Once in debt a diver is prohibited from hiring to another *nakhoda*—he must repay his debt to the man who gave him cash advances. A diver or anyone else who accepts an advance in the pearling industry has sold himself to economic slavery, for the *nakhoda* owns his ability to work, while the man must support himself. Thus, a diver is bound to return to the purgatory of pearling at the *nakhoda's* call. Since Muslim law prohibits interest or usury the debt system effectively gets around this. The *nakhoda* is usually in turn bound to some merchant in the same way, for he has taken cash advances to give to his divers and attendants.

567 465 In Oman the *nakhodas* often hire their labor from a tribal agent, giving the agent an advance of money and rice. In the case of slaves, the agent takes this to the slaves' master; at the end of the season he collects the balance of the slaves' earnings. Thus the slaves' earnings go completely to his master, who in return clothes and feeds him.

228 656 426 On Bahrein Island the Bahrein Government has, at the suggestion of the British, effected many reforms in the pearling industry with respect to the debt system. Hereditary debts have been abolished; pearl divers on Bahrein now take their debts to

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MT1

K MA 505 565

Negro origin, the descendants of slaves, though not now slaves themselves. Many others are of Iranian origin. Almost none are Bedouin, for the Arab Bedouin is not a seafaring man. In Kuwait, the callings open to the low-class Iranian are restricted to portering, pearling (either as diver or as tender), and sailing. Both Iranians and Negroes work splendidly, are loyal, competent, and well disciplined.

MA 565 426 465 228 428

As the *nakhoda* class is tied to the merchant by a structure of debt, so also are the sailors tied to the *nakhoda* class in the same way. All deep-sea sailing is paid for on a shares system, and there are no wages. Often the *nakhoda* of the deep-sea dhow has an interest in a pearling vessel (though not now to anything like the same extent as in former years), and the sailor may be bound to him through pearling debts, either his own or inherited. The more iniquitous practices in the pearling business structure have long been on the way out, largely because of the excellent example set at Bahrein, but the debt tradition stands and is almost impossible to eradicate.

MA 505 511 342 291 515 501 565

The sailors go to sea because they know no other life, and they make a wretched living by incredibly difficult methods. They have no possessions other than the clothes they stand in, and one or two spare gowns, a good headcloth, and a few sarongs. Their toothbrush is the twig of a tree; their ablutions are made five times daily at a mosque well, or in the sea; they know no shelter and rarely have a bed. The younger seamen, I have noticed, often have no home other than the *suq*, or native bazaar, where they coil down in their rough cloaks for a night's sleep on a bench in a cheap coffee shop, or in the sand. At sea, they stretch out on the deck, beneath the stars, for there is no such thing as accommodation for the seamen or anyone else in most dhows. The officers and the more important merchants live on a bench round the wheel, in the stern of the ship; the seamen lie down anywhere.

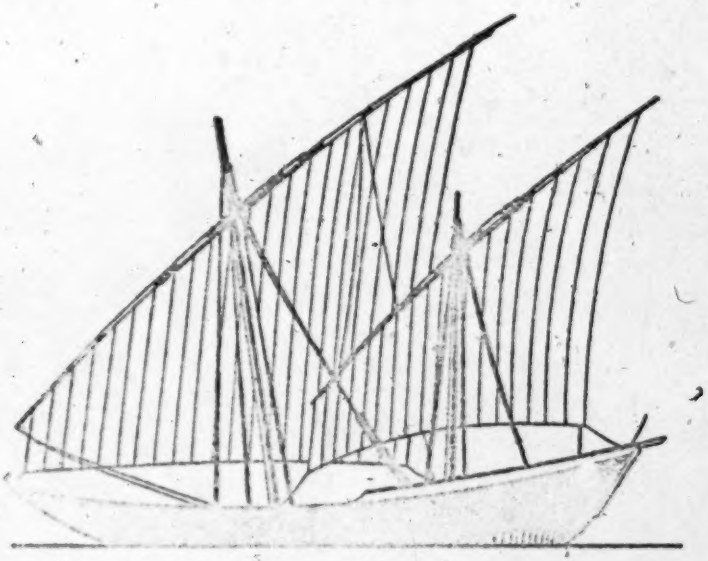
MA 565 554 165

What keeps the seaman a disciplined and more or less contented worker is his hope of reward, principally from smuggling or his own ventures, and his ambition to get hold of a tiny shop in the *suq* of his home town. This is an ambition he rarely achieves. His more usual fate is to die young, especially if he be

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arab: MK2

of Dar es Salaam, loaded her with mangrove poles, and brought her back to Zanzibar again, where the *nakhoda* had ostensibly been trying to assemble passengers and extra cargo for the return to Arabia but in fact had been enjoying a new harem.

Mates are paid by shares, and are, in my opinion, an oppressed class. They carry their own ventures, engage in smuggling on a



Baggala

small scale — haberdashery, currency, and so forth — and generally keep the ship's books. They may become *nakhodas* of small *booms*, running to the Basra river; but it is unusual for a man from the more dignified deep-sea trades to descend to this. There is no social status about the *nakhoda* of a coastwise water dhow.

Ships are built by shipwrights who employ no naval architects. Both builders and riggers' lofts are unknown. The ships are put together entirely by eye and take the traditional form either of the double-ended *boom*, or the carved and embellished *baggala*, which obviously has a considerable ancestry from the Portuguese galleon.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait ME1
Zanzibar FM1

that any new crew members in Arab ships joined voluntarily; vessels must not be overmanned, and crew and passenger lists must be provided and in order; ships must be surveyed, and kept seaworthy; and *nakhodas* must be certificated. As for the last, the port officials conduct examinations, and the general principle seems to be that if a man is capable enough to bring a dhow down to Zanzibar, certificate or no certificate, he can also be trusted to sail her away again. But the fee for examination is fifteen shillings, and the Arabs complain about it.

We touched at Zanzibar again after loading in the Rufiji, re-embarked our *nakhoda* and took aboard a few Swahili school-teachers as passengers (they proposed to hire an automobile at Kuwait to take them to Mecca), filled the decks with coconuts and cases of soap and vermicelli, and departed toward the Persian Gulf again with the first of the broken weather at the end of the northeast season. We did not await the coming of the true south-west monsoons, for it sets in hard; we sailed direct to Muscat, in twenty-six days.

Muscat was depressed and there was no trade there, not even smuggling. All that changed hands, as far as I could see, was a box of Maria Theresa thalers, enormous Austrian coins minted in London for the Omani and available in Zanzibar at a price less than the exchange rate in Muscat. The Arabs turned everything to profit and were prepared to sell anything, even the ship. The sailors' pastime in the Rufiji was buying lemons — a thousand for a shilling — and converting them into sherbet, which they hawked in the *suq* at Kuwait throughout the summer.

Our cargo of mangrove poles sold at Bahrein, the ship returned to Kuwait, to lay up inside a coral breakwater until the new season's Iraqi dates ripened and it was time to go out again. At Kuwait, when all her people were returned — several relations of the *nakhoda* had dispersed from Zanzibar back to Lamu and Mogadishu to collect debts — a general balance sheet of the whole round voyage was struck, the profits computed carefully, and divided by a system of shares arranged traditionally. It was not a straightforward statement of income and expenditure; I never saw or heard of any piece of Arab seafaring business which was as simple as that. It was all complicated by prior advances,

2: Villiers T-8 (1938-39) 1948 MKS Maritime Arabs MK2

debts, odd earnings not shared and even odder earnings which were shared, and mysterious complicated procedures, some of which I never did fathom, for the war came, and stopped my investigations.

The son of the merchant family which owned our dhow, however, told me that her gross profit on the nine-month round voyage was 11,000 rupees, not including the proceeds of the crews' and officers' private ventures. But I think he exaggerated, for the total investment in the dhow was little more than that. But at any rate, the dhow's people were well satisfied and they all, save one, went back to sea with her. The *nakhoda* grew fat throughout the summer, and took a new wife, and a new *boom* for his brother at a cost of 10,500 rupees; and I heard no complaints from the merchants.

As far as I was able to discover, half the gross earnings went to the ship; this was the merchant's share. The cost of the food for the round voyage (which was not much, for all hands lived very simply and fishing lines were the most important equipment in what passed for her storeroom) was deducted from the other half, and the remainder was then divided by shares arranged strictly in accordance with the accepted value of each man's rating aboard. The sailor's share on the voyage which I made was reported to be 135 rupees (about $40), whereof 35 rupees had been advanced. This was little enough for such a long voyage, and though they worked hard at all sorts of things and were ready for any kind of business, I doubt whether a sailor's earnings from other sources amounted to more than 20 or 30 rupees, clear.

I heard of dhows from Kuwait that season which were distributing less than 100 rupees; according to the Kuwaiti, who had no high opinion of them, the Suri rarely paid out more than fifty. To a sailor whose only home was the sand of the *suq* and his bed the cloak around him, whose wants were few and whose paradise was assured, even 50 rupees may be a vast sum of money. There was, at any rate, contentment throughout the Arab shipping industry as I knew it, and the quiet philosophy I learned among the simple seamen was of great help to me in the days of the long-drawn war which was soon to follow.

3: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

228 his great toe completely severed by a large piece of faroush that had slipped and hit his foot as he stood on the sea bottom.

Hasa, known to Americans familiar with native construction in Arabia as "sea rock," is found on the sea bottom in more or less solid deposits, from which a diver pries pieces (Fig. 15). Faroush is much more difficult to mine: it takes at least a day to get a boatload, whereas a crew may get three

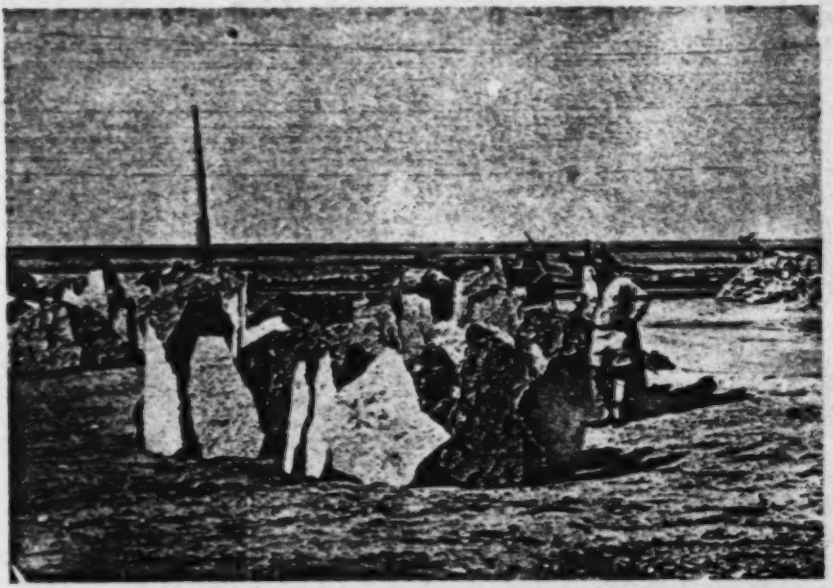


FIG. 14—Author standing by slabs of *faroush* on the shore of Bahrein Island. Faroush is mined near Bahrein in much larger pieces than in Arabian waters. Pile of *hasa* in right background.

or four boatloads of hasa a day. Faroush is sold by the square measure, hasa by the cubic measure.

228 The rock divers, like the pearl divers, work only in the warmer months.
464 Since they generally work in water that is shallower than the pearl waters
461 and therefore remains warm longer, the mining season is two or three months longer than the pearling season, which is only four months. The rock divers do not work constantly, hour after hour, day in and day out, as the pearl
[339 divers do, since each boatload has to be sailed to shore. A small stock pile
317] of faroush and hasa is always maintained in every seaboard town, and most of its buildings are constructed from these two rocks. Lime is made by burning hasa.

426 The crews mining coral rock work on the "debt system," notoriously
465 exploited in the Persian Gulf pearling industry. Although they are paid good

2: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

wages, they are given cash advances and food during the winter and during slack periods. They never seem able to pay off their debts to the dhow owners.

PEARLING

The most colorful marine industry of the Persian Gulf is pearling.[1] Pearling is definitely a seasonal occupation, confined to the months when

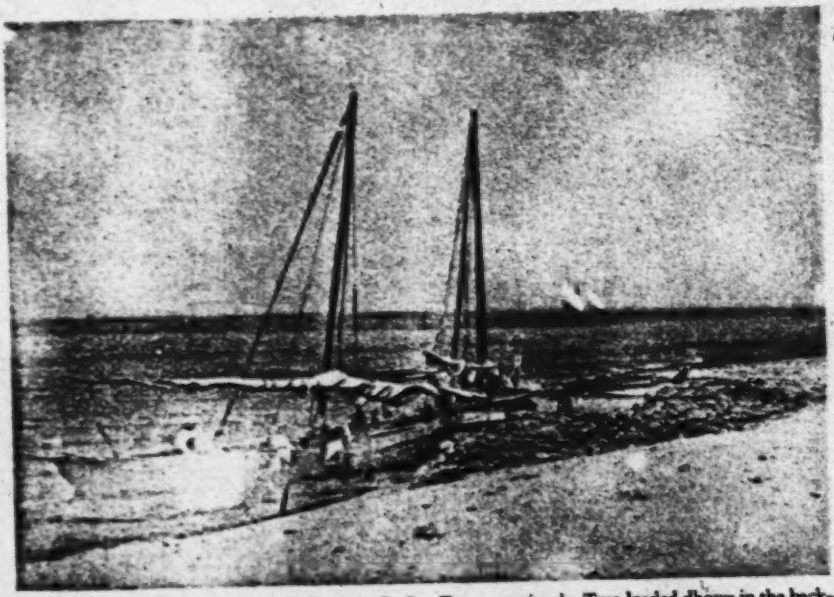


FIG. 15—Unloading huss from jalbuts on the Ras Tanura peninsula. Two loaded dhows in the background are bringing in more.

the water is warm. On the Persian Gulf coast of Arabia the minimum winter air temperature is in the middle forties, the shallow-sea temperature in the low sixties. From long experience the Arabs have found that they can begin deepwater diving in June and continue until the first week in October. At the start and finish of the season the surface-water temperature is about 85°, but the deep-water temperature is considerably less; the maximum surface-water temperature may exceed 100° in August. Before this main season the *ghaus al-kabir* (great diving), there is a season of about two months, known as the *ghaus al-barid* (cold diving), when smaller boats work the shallower waters near their home ports; during the winter many men go out as "waders" at low tide to pick up what they can just below tide level.

[1] See also R. LeB. Bowen, Jr.: The Pearl Fisheries of the Persian Gulf, *Middle East Journ.*, Vol. 5, 1951, pp. 161–180.

228 all end up in Bombay. The Indians drill, polish, and grade the pearls, and
492 string them on silk; these short strands are known as "Bombay bunches."
439 Before World War II the pearls were sent to India by streamer; today they
509 are usually sent by air from Bahrein, Kuweit, Sharjah, and Dharan. The pearls are usually sold to Indian merchants in these towns, but occasionally the Arabs themselves take the pearls to Bombay.

228 After all the pearls have been sold, the nakhoda figures out the season's
•465 profit. The owner of the dhows gets half the profit; the other half is divided among the crew. Most of the pearling dhows out of Saudi Arabian ports are small (not more than 40 feet), with crews of ten -- six divers and four attendants -- in addition to the nakhoda. Each diver and each attendant gets one share in the profits (about 4 per cent); the nakhoda gets two shares, unless he owns the dhow and longboat, in which case, of course, he gets more than half the profit. The number of shares each of the crew, the nakhoda, and the owner get is agreed on at the beginning of the season and may vary from place to place. Many of the pearling dhows out of Kuweit and Bahrein are considerably larger than those out of the Saudi Arabian ports and may have crews of forty or more; on these the nakhoda gets a larger number of shares.

Pearling is a gamble for everyone concerned, from the merchants to the divers. Some seasons are good, some bad; sometimes a boat has bad luck, sometimes excellent luck. A share on a pearling dhow should be worth several hundred rupees, but it may not be worth fifty.

228 Usually a share on a pearling dhow represents a year's wages, since the
426 pearling industry operates under the "debt system" mentioned above (not to be confused with the "truck system" of pearl fisheries elsewhere, in which the divers are paid off in produce). Under the debt system the divers and attendants are given cash advances during the winter season, when they are not working, and their families are given food and supplies while the season is on. The advances are deducted from their calculated shares, so that usually the worker gets little or nothing.

Thus the divers and attendants are perpetually in debt. Once a worker is in debt to a nakhoda, he cannot work for anyone else during the pearling season; this is one of the laws of the industry. He has virtually sold himself into economic slavery to the nakhoda, who has his services and never actually has to pay him anything, whereas he in effect pays the nakhoda in the pearls he produces. However, it should be remembered that the nakhoda is in turn usually in debt to some merchant, who commonly finances numerous nakhodas.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

waters from May to September, and why most local Indian craft are drawn up on the beaches.

II

Dates are probably as important a factor as the monsoons in maintaining the large lateen fleet in the waters of the Indian Ocean. By a lucky coincidence, the great date crop of Iraq begins to ripen just before the northeast monsoon sets in about October. The great maritime expansion of the port of Kuwait has probably been due in no small part to its proximity to Basra, the port through which most of Iraq's dates go.

Dhows come to Basra for dates from Kuwait, Bahrein, Persia, Oman, India, and even as far away as the Hadhramaut. Starting in the latter part of August and continuing into September, Kuwait deepwater ships are floated from the beaches, where they have rested for several months during the summer, making ready for the run to Basra to pick up dates. The farther the home port is from Basra, the earlier the ships must depart, so that craft from the Hadhramaut must allow a month or more to get to Basra, riding up to the Gulf of Oman on the summer monsoon and then working their way up the Persian Gulf, where the monsoon is not felt.

Almost without exception the date cargo is carried out of Basra on consignment for some merchant; sometimes the destination is known on leaving Basra, but often the consignment is sent to Aden or Mukalla (see Plate 23—bottom) in South Arabia for final shipping instructions from the Arab or Indian export firm shipping the dates. Dates are usually not carried into the Red Sea much past Hodeida in the Yemen in Kuwait ships, although Villiers[14] tells of a Kuwait *bhum* transporting a load of dates as far as Qizan in Saudi Arabia.

In such a manner dates have been leaving Iraq for decades bound for the southern shores—that is until the winter of 1949. In that winter, for the first time in many years, the great date-bearing Kuwait *bhum* fleet failed to appear in its usual strength in the waters along the southern shores of Arabia; only a portion of the usual quota appeared in Aden by the first of 1950. The dates that would ordinarily have come into Aden in Kuwait dhows came down unceremoniously under steam. What caused this abrupt change in the well-established status quo of the dhow trade? The same thing that has wrought so many other radical changes in the economy of the Middle East lately—oil!

Kuwait is actually a city-state with few industries except pearling, fishing, and shipbuilding; there are no farms, no date plantations, and only

[14] A. Villiers, *55*, p. 366.

361 a few scattered Bedouin tribes. The Kuwait Oil Company is now operating in high gear, and has apparently offered so many opportunities for natives that *nakhodas* (captains) have difficulty in getting men to sail their ships at the wages they can offer. Sailors never get any regular wages on a dhow, receiving a share of the earnings of the ship only after the voyage is over. Many sailors have apparently found that it is a comfortable feeling to receive a regular wage every week! It is too early yet to tell whether or not the change is permanent.

#39 505 There has also been a noticeable fall-off in date-bearing Arab dhows sailing to India, but apparently for a different reason. Vaidya[12] states that during the 1943-1944 season, presumably for the first time, sixty to seventy per cent of the Arab fleet that usually brought dates failed to appear because of Arab restrictions on the export of wet dates and because of the high prevailing prices of the dates. Thus, this case is not allied to the present situation prevailing in Kuwait, as during the 1943-1944 season dates presumably were not shipped to India by any other means.

However, even if Kuwait is unable to put its *bhums* to sea, the date crop in the future will still probably be carried out of the Persian Gulf in dhows as usual; it will take time to attain a balance again. Whether the port of Sur rises to the challenge or whether some Persian port takes the trade remains to be seen. The Suris from Oman are logical successors to Kuwait, for in times past they have been noted for taking cargoes at lower rates than the Kuwaiti or any other mariners could afford to, and they have a long maritime history.

It is interesting to note that oil activities in other areas in the Persian Gulf have drastically affected the marine activities of other coastal towns. Over ten years ago, the Saudi Arabian ports of Jubail, Qatîf, and Darin used to send out over a hundred dhows yearly to join the Persian Gulf pearl fisheries. Now if they send out several dozen dhows it is news; the Arabs who used to dive for pearls now have steady jobs with the Arabian American Oil Company. The same has happened on Bahrein Island. The Bahrein *nakhodas* are no longer able to find a multitude of divers who will accept the wage the *nakhodas* are able to offer; thus the Bahrein pearl fleet is only a shadow of what it was a quarter of a century ago.

439 226 Most but not all Arab dhows load dates first; however, many Omani dhows bring cargoes of dried fish and fish oil, for fishing is particularly good in the waters off Oman, and sharks and large tuna are caught in considerable amounts, both for home consumption and export. Sometimes, however, the Omanis may set out for Africa empty, or with only a partial

[12] K. B. Vaidya, op. cit., p. 207.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

banking system, interest, usury, or insurance. The economy of the Arabs is built on a tremendous pyramid of debt which has the lowly sailor, fisherman, farmer, and coolie on the base and a sheikh on top; this system, which may well be called the 'debt system,' operates efficiently and effectively, but has been notoriously overworked in the case of pearling activities in the Persian Gulf.

At the start, a merchant will finance a *nakhoda* for building a deepwater dhow.[56] Thus the *nakhoda* is the *nominal* owner of the dhow, but he is indebted to the merchant. If the *nakhoda* had enough money to buy a dhow himself, he would finance someone else and become a merchant himself. This arrangement suits the merchants, for if the ship goes down, the *nakhoda* (or his family) must pay back the value of the cargo and the cost of the dhow as well. Thus the merchant has an 'insurance' on his investment. A merchant may have a dozen *nakhodas* so indebted to him.

The *nakhoda*, on the other hand, has all his sailors and crew indebted to him. He never pays them any regular wages, but gives them advances of food and money when they need it. Thus, as we saw above, the sailors have to make the sails and rig a new ship if they are to sail it. Only when the voyage has terminated six months or a year later, and the ship has been beached in the home port, do the sailors get their share of the earnings of the voyage. But by this time many of them have no share coming, as the *nakhoda* usually has advanced them more than their share amounts to, so he must give them another advance; this is to the *nakhoda's* liking, as he then has the sailors indebted to him. Once a sailor owes a *nakhoda* money, the sailor cannot ship with another *nakhoda* until the debt is paid. The sailors pay for only half of what they eat, for when it comes to the final accounting (if such a civilized term can be applied to the figuring), the total food cost is subtracted from the gross earnings.

The *nakhoda* receives about four or five times the sailors' share, while the mate receives about half as much as the *nakhoda*; some members of the crew receive a little more than the common sailors. The shares received by the twenty-seven men eligible for shares on the Kuwait *bhum* on which Villiers[57] sailed in 1939 are as follows:

	Value of Share	*Number of Shares*	*Total Shares*
Nakhoda (captain)	5	1	5
Mu'allim (mate)	3	1	3
Quartermaster	1½	3	4½

[56] Not everyone can become a *nakhoda*, for the *nakhoda* must come from a family which can pay the debt if the *nakhoda* should be unable to.

[57] A. Villiers, 55, p. 425.

426
465

Serang (boatswain)	1½		1½
Serang's mate	1¼	1	1¼
Cook	1½	1	1½
Steward (storekeeper)	1¼	1	1¼
Sailors	1	18	18
Total shares			36
Nakhoda's extra 4 and mate's extra 2 shares			6
Net shares for crew's half of dhow's earnings			30

The *nakhoda's* four and the mate's two extra shares are taken from the ship's part of the earnings. On the voyage that Villiers made, the ship grossed 9,600 rupees and spent some 1,500 rupees on foodstuffs; this gave a net earning of 8,100 rupees. Half of this was considered the crew's share for the voyage, so the thirty shares were worth 135 rupees each (after the *nakhoda's* and the mate's extra six shares were deducted from the total shares). The ship's expenses and upkeep, as well as the *nakhoda's* and the mate's extra shares, came from the dhow's earnings; the balance went to the merchant financing the vessel. If we assume that the yearly upkeep of the dhow was 1,000 rupees (which it never would be, as the crew does all the work on their share of the earnings), the owner's share on his investment of 12,500 rupees (the total original cost of the completed dhow) was 2,240 rupees, or approximately eighteen per cent. However, this is probably closer to twenty per cent, as the yearly upkeep probably did not run over 500 rupees. This would not hold up under strict accounting, as no depreciation has been charged off. Also no insurance on hull or cargo was carried as there are few if any Arab insurance firms. However, when Arab craft make return trips from India they usually insure the cargo with an Indian firm.

Villiers[38] estimates that the sailors might have netted twenty rupees extra in their own trading, that the mate might have made several hundred, while the *nakhoda* might have made a thousand rupees in his deals —mostly from Persian rugs and carved chests. Thus the owner received a twenty per cent return on his investment for the year, while the sailors received about 150 rupees ($45.00) then for a year's work. That seems rather unbalanced, does it not?

I have found the same general system of shares applying to pearling and fishing activities as well as to mariners in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, and along the coasts of South Arabia. In general, however, it is more

[38] Ibid., p. 426.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arab MK2

clean-cut in Villiers' case, as all the shares of the *nakhoda* and the mate come from the crew's half of the net earnings. On the 240-ton *sambuk El Wafi*, which I boarded in Aden in 1950, the shares were as follows:[99]

	Value of Share	*Number of Shares*	*Total Shares*
Nakhoda (captain)	4	1	4
Serang (mate)	2	1	2
Sukkani (quartermaster or helmsman)	1½	3	4½
Muqaddam (boatswain)	1¼	1	1¼
Katib (clerk)	1½	1	1½
Wakil (steward)	1¼	1	1¼
Bakri or *mallah* (sailors)	1	33	33
Total shares			47½

In India some crews are paid on a salary basis, but many others work on a share basis. However, in India the owner takes one-third of whatever the ship earns. Then the craft's expenses while she was at sea and the supplies for the crew are deducted from the remaining two-thirds; the remainder is then divided among the captain and crew according to shares.[99] By dividing the profits in this manner the Indian owner gets about a quarter less than the Arab, while the Indian crew gets about ten per cent more.

The largest importer and exporter in Aden, and probably the whole Gulf of Aden for that matter, is A. Besse and Company, operated by a shrewd Frenchman, Mr. Antone Besse. Among Besse's various holdings in the Middle East are twelve dhows, all registered in Aden. The *El Wafi* was one of the twelve *sambuks* owned by A. Besse, and operated in the Gulf of Aden and the lower Red Sea. On the average these dhows made four trips a month. The *nakhoda* was given advances, which he in turn gave to the crew, before each trip. After four trips the gross return for

[99] It will be noted that the Arabic names in Villiers' list of the members of the crew on a Kuwait *bhum* and in my list of the members of the crew of an Aden *sambuk* are not the same; however, this does not mean that either is necessarily wrong. The Arabic names on my list were checked from three independent sources in Aden, and my informants in Aden recognized Villiers' *mu'allim* as the word the Kuwaiti used for 'mate.' Villiers indicated on his list 'quartermaster' but did not give the Arabic for the word. The Arabic word that I found in use in Aden for this member of the crew was *sukkani*, which comes from *sukkan*, the Arabic for 'rudder.' Thus it would seem that the more proper translation of the word is 'rudder-man' or 'helmsman,' although his position on the dhow is really that of 'quartermaster.' The word *muqaddam* is the word commonly used on land to refer to a 'headman' who is the leader of any other group of working-men. However, on a dhow the *muqaddam* is the man who superintends the letting go and the weighing of the anchor, so the translation of the word when applied to seafaring men is properly 'boatswain.' The important fact evident from the two lists is that there is always a consistency in the top officers of a dhow—there are a captain, a mate, three quartermasters (or helmsmen), and a boatswain, irrespective of the Arabic name by which they are known.

[99] K. B. Vaidya, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

4; Bowen C-5 (1959) 1961 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

the cargo the dhow had hauled was figured and the cost of the food consumed by the officers and crew was deducted, giving the net earning of the dhow. One-half belonged to the crew and was divided into forty-seven and one-half shares as shown above. The other half belonged to the owner, and represented his return on his investment; the owner had to maintain the dhows from his half of the earnings. As we saw above in the case of the figures presented by Villiers, the owner has little to deduct from his share of the ship's earnings, so his return on his investment is considerable. It is little wonder that Mr. A. Besse was recently able to give Oxford University a contribution of £2,000,000!

Over one hundred years ago, the French Admiral F. E. Paris spent considerable time in the waters around Muscat and wondered how Arab ships could at that time compete with the more efficient European sailing ships. Paris summed up his conclusions as follows:

> ... les Arabs qui les montent habitués au retour périodique des moussons, n'exécutent, en general, qu'un voyage par an ... [ils] entendent bien le commerce; malgré cela, ils sont rarement employés par les Europeans ... et, comme ils ne prennent que de trés-faibles cargaisons, ce n'est que grâce à l'extréme économie des Arabs qu'ils peuvent servir pour le commerce.[42]

Only a decade ago, one hundred years after Paris, men of other lands were still wondering how an Arab sailing fleet could possibly survive in the present era of oil and steam; to satisfy his curiosity Alan Villiers dedicated a year of his life to sailing with the Arabs in their dhows. Villiers has summed up the reasons for the survival of the dhow fleet as follows:

> One reason—perhaps the chief—why the ancient trade with the monsoons down the Indian Ocean not only survives but flourishes is that the dhows warehouse the goods they carry as well as transport them, and it suits the merchants better to have 10,000 packages of new season's dates divided among a fleet of dhows, than in the hold of one steamer which will unload the lot in a day or two, and flood the market. Ten thousand packages provide cargoes for at least five large dhows; the dhow master does not care how long he takes to discharge his cargo, for his overheads are trifling, his crew works on shares and handles all cargo, and his vessel pays practically no port dues.[43]

While in Aden in 1950, the writer investigated the intriguing problem of dhow economics, as applied to the coastal craft operating around

[42] F. E. Paris, *Essai sur la Construction Navale des Peuples Extra-Européens* (Paris, Bertrand, [1841]). p. 9. '... the Arabs who man them, accustomed to the periodic reversal of the monsoons, carry out, in general only one voyage a year ... they understand commerce well; in spite of that, they are rarely employed by Europeans ... and, as they carry only very poor cargoes, it is only because of the extreme economy of the Arabs that they can be of use for commerce.'

[43] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 400-401.

505 craft on the west coast of India engaged in coastal trade over the one thousand-mile coastline. These vessels averaged only about forty tons and carried on the average eight-man crews. It is extremely interesting to note that Vaidya[88] concluded that these vessels never made voyages to ports over four hundred to five hundred miles away, always staying within a five hundred-mile radius of their home ports. The only vessels that made longer trips were the larger craft from the Gulf of Cutch and the Sind coast, these craft carrying Indian trade to Africa, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf. Thus in India the same economic balance that is found in the Gulf of Aden governs the coastal trade. These coastal craft would rather return home in ballast than travel out of their arbitrary 'zone' for a cargo.

479 Admiral Paris thought that the dhows could exist in the face of more
465 efficient European sailing ships only because of the extreme economy of
505 the Arabs. Villiers thought that the main reason the deepwater dhow could still exist in large numbers in the present day of steam was in the main because of the date-storehousing ability of the dhow, which did not tend to flood the market with dates. However, as we have seen above, the 1949 crop of dates entered Aden under steam, rather than on Kuwait dhows.

No, the answer to the question is of a more fundamental nature than either Paris' or Villiers' reason. It is this writer's opinion that the main and only reason why deepwater dhows can survive in this day and age is the system of sailors' wages—the 'debt system.' The Arab capitalists' philosophy is 'Get a man in debt and then never pay him enough to get out of debt.' Certainly this is true about the deepwater Arab craft that sail from the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman to Africa; the crews are paid once a year, so that by the time they do receive their pay the advances made to them usually consume most of their wage. This would tend to be less true if the sailors were paid more frequently. It is interesting to note that A. Besse operates his coastal dhows under the debt system and shares, paying off only once a month and giving out liberal advances in between to keep the sailors in debt.

However, this is not the most important factor keeping the large number of coastal craft operating in areas like the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea, and the west coast of India. These coastal craft provide a very valuable service by moving cargo in small amounts to ports not usually visited by steamers; steamers find it uneconomical to make short hauls of small cargoes. However, what may be considered a small cargo for a steamer may fill several dhows. In many instances these coastal craft furnish the only transportation to many small off-the-beat ports.

[88] Ibid., p. 103.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

craft furnish the only transportation to many small off-the-track ports. In addition to this it must be remembered that the dhow (or other native coastal craft) can navigate shallow harbors and creeks, while a steamer could not get closer than several miles. Thus there will always be a place for these short range coasters. However, the future of the deepwater dhow is another question.

The debt system has worked for centuries to the economic advantage of those financing the dhows, and to the economic disadvantage of those working on them. It has been impossible for the sailors to break away, as they can never work for another *nakhoda* when in debt to one. There is only one way to break away, and that is to pay the debt. Becoming a farmer or a fisherman does not help, as they usually operate under the debt system also.

On its face in such a financial set-up the merchant has everything to gain and absolutely nothing to lose. In the case above (where the shares, and thus the sailors' wage, were worth about 150 rupees and the merchant made eighteen per cent on his investment on the dhow), if the dhow had made only one-half of what it had, the merchant would still have received about ten per cent on his investment, but the poor sailors would have received only 75 rupees ($22.50) as a year's wage. Thus the dhow can compete against steam only at a sacrifice of the unfortunate economic slaves sailing the dhow. The dhow sailors do all the stevedoring, maintenance work, and sailing for their lowly share of the dhow's earnings; if the sailors received a decent wage (even if only on Eastern standards), the deepwater dhow could not stay afloat as a cargo vessel. Coastal craft operating short distances do pay higher wages on the average than the deepwatermen.

However, the advent of the large oil companies in the Middle East has provided a means wherein the sailors can escape from the bonds of economic slavery. By making jobs which pay good money (on Eastern standards) dhow sailors are able to free themselves of their debts and become free men. We have seen above that the oil companies in Saudi Arabia and on Bahrein Island have decreased the number of boats the pearl fisheries can send out, as they cannot get divers to work for the wage they can offer. Kuwait has long been able to keep a large deepwater cargo fleet of *bhums* on the waters around the Indian Ocean because Kuwait had a surplus of cheap labor—there was little else to do in Kuwait besides work in marine activities. Now that the Kuwait Oil Company has made jobs available to the local Arabs, the cheap labor market is gone for the Kuwait *nakhodas*. Thus as the standard of living is increased and cheap labor

4: Bowen C-5 (1960) 1961 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

becomes no longer available, the deepwater dhow is doomed. The dhow cannot operate in competition with steam if it has to pay the sailors respectable wages; that is, as long as the merchants demand one-half of the dhow earnings.

While traffic in human cargo is virtually a thing of the past, the dhows that coast along the Arabian, African, and Indian shores still have slave crews on them. Although not owned bodily, the crews are bound economically to their masters, the *nakhodas*, while the *nakhodas* themselves are economic slaves of the merchants. But, while the crews get little actual compensation when the pay-off finally comes, they are happy and well-fed and have known nothing else. Allah is compassionate, and there is always a Paradise waiting for their poor souls!

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs MK2

From the proceeds of the season's catch one-fifth is turned over to the owner of the boat as rent for its use, and from the remainder the season's expenses for food, water and the like are deducted. The money that is left represents the profits of the season. Each diver receives an equal share of this; each assistant two-thirds of a share. The captain, who has done no diving but has superintended the season's campaign, receives a diver's share, as does the sheikh of the town in some instances, this being the government tax upon the industry.

This seems a good system. In theory it could hardly be improved, but in practice it could hardly be worse. The divers cannot read or write, so they have no way of knowing whether or not their accounts are correctly kept. They may not assist in, or even witness, the process of sale, so they have not the slightest control over the captain, nor any means of protecting themselves from dishonesty on his part. The captain himself is between the upper and nether millstones, for the only way he can rent a diving boat is by promising to sell his pearls to the owner of that boat, and from this owner he may receive not over fifty per cent of their market price. Even this reduced price the divers do not receive undiminished, for the captain enriches himself privately at their expense before the sale is reported. Then as if matters were not bad enough, almost without exception the men are in their captain's debt, and remain so throughout their lives.

The fact that nearly all the divers are in debt is partly their own fault. When a man begins to dive, he could avoid borrowing money if he were at all determined to do so. The diving season lasts only five months at the outside, and the season's proceeds may be sufficient to live on for the whole year with economy and care. If they

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1926) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs M

body and soul. The one redeeming feature of the system is that debts are not transmissible from father to son and theoretically each boy starts out with a clean slate, but too often the filial loyalty of the son is appealed to and he assumes his father's debts. This plan allows the old man to retire from his life of hardship. Nothing suits the captain better, for thus the boy is deprived of his only chance to keep free from the slavery that has bound his father.

But in spite of its financial drawbacks the work has a great fascination for the Arab, and this is largely because of its element of chance. The Oriental is an inveterate gambler, and the Arab is no exception. Some years the reward of an individual diver may be next to nothing. Another season he may make a thousand *rupees*, or about three hundred and fifty dollars. Over night the whole aspect of the season may change. A pearl worth fifty thousand *rupees* may be discovered at any time. The largest pearl sold locally during the past ten years brought one hundred and twenty thousand *rupees*. Arabs tell of boats whose divers have cleared over two thousand *rupees* or more in a season, but such mythical individuals are hard to find. It is far easier to find the man who has failed to make two *rupees*. However, to do the industry justice, such individuals are rare also. In fair seasons the average must lie somewhere between three hundred and seven hundred *rupees*, or one hundred to two hundred and fifty dollars.

At the end of the season the profit, such as it is, is reported and the money divided. The divers each receive their share, and the assistants each two-thirds of a share. Men in debt receive a more or less liberal allowance, and the town is filled with rejoicing divers who have just re-

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 MI Middle East
Mu... Thesis MH2

turned from four months or more of exhausting work, during which time they have been half starved and have had no opportunity of finding enjoyment and pleasure, legitimate or otherwise. The result[1] is precisely what might be expected. Persian rugs in the bazaar go up to twice their proper price as does anything else that the divers may fancy. Meat reaches the highest price of the year, and the same is true of fish, which food the divers enjoy above everything else. Gambling is all but universal. Immorality flourishes. This state of affairs lasts a month, perhaps two months. Then things gradually settle down into the regular winter stagnation until the next diving season.

The same thing happens on a smaller scale when the season opens. Advances are made to the men. Feasts are held. There is much good fellowship and coöperation as the preparations for the season are completed. The chanting of singers can be heard late into the night. The money advanced by the captains makes a great show as it is spent. Strangers come in from far and near to go out and dive with the local men, and the city wears such a gala appearance as it scarcely puts on again till the next season.

It is thus that an astonishingly attractive tinsel surface is maintained over an industry and a manner of life that even for Arabia are bitterly sordid and exhausting. The pearl diver's life is one of poverty, hard and cruel. In a bad season it is with difficulty that he gets enough to eat. His lot is distinctly worse than that of the date cultivator. Diving wrecks the health as no other Arabian occupation wrecks it. The high pressure of the water at great depths frequently bursts the ear drums, and it is a safe conjecture that no community of equal size anywhere can show

*[Lot divers returning with their wages -- Amlyet]

466

466 LABOR RELATIONS--respective rights, privileges, and powers of employers and employees; hiring and firing; tenure of employment; instruction and supervision; promotion and retirement; pension plans; working conditions (e.g., hours, hygienic conditions, safety provisions, recreational facilities); prevalence and types of forced labor; indentured labor; regulation (e.g., labor legislation); etc. See also:

Business and industrial organization 47
Domestic servants 357
Peonage and serfdom 588
Prison and penal labor 697
Military labor battalions 708
Slavery 867
Bride-service 883
Taxation through labor levies 681
Social insurance 745
Vocational training 874

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

his vessel pays practically no port dues. His dates can therefore be warehoused in the dhow, until the market can easily absorb them.

The dhow trade is "native" trade, a stubborn plant which has been growing a long, long time. Nearly all the cargoes carried in dhows are for the native bazaars, and almost never for European account. Much of the cargoes consists of goods which the dhow captain himself, or some merchant or merchants travelling with him, sells for his own profit. The dhow is a peddler, as well as a carrier; a storehouse, as well as a ship; a means of livelihood to travelling merchants, as well as to her crew proper. Basra dates, though the most important outward cargo,[1] are only one source of revenue: there are a host of others, not necessarily always legitimate.

Kuwaiti owners of date plantations on the nearby Basra river play a considerable part in the financing of deep-sea dhows, though in most cases the captains, called *nakhodas*, are at least the nominal owners. It suits the merchants well that the *nakhodas* should regard themselves as the owners, for this provides them with a cheap form of insurance. If the dhow be lost it is the *nakhoda's* loss, and not the merchant's, for the poor captain must pay back not only the value of the dhow but the advance of freight given him to finance his voyage. Since Islam forbids all forms of ordinary insurance, this arrangement is to the merchant's liking. The *nakhodas* must accept it, for in most cases there is no other way by which they can acquire a big dhow.

In Kuwait, immediately prior to the outbreak of World War II, there was beginning to be some restiveness about this, and an association of the *nakhodas* had the temerity to issue its demands upon the merchants. These included payment of demurrage when unduly delayed at the loading berths in Basra (a dhow might be kept for weeks waiting for her cargo), a sliding scale of freights for different ports instead of the customary flat rate of 1.5 or 2 rupees a package regardless of destination, liability for the return of advances to cease with the loss of the ship, two competent officers for every seagoing dhow, and so forth. The demands represente

[1] Crew requirements and the very measurments of the dhows themselves are reckoned in terms of dates. A sailor to each 100 packages is the general rule, in Kuwait, and a dhow is spoken of there as having a capacity for 2,000 packages of dates, rather than as being of 100 tons burden.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-1939) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

K
MA
456
471
784
466

a bare minimun, surely, and no more than a nakhoda's right, but the merchants' answer was that if the nakhodas could make new rules, so also could they; and they had the real power. I do not think the attempt of the nakhodas got them very far.

MA
443
505
439

While the dates are generally carried both to India and East Africa on a freight basis, nearly all other cargo is bought to the ship's own account and peddled to best advantage. The merchants have a substantial share in the dhow's earnings, apart from the sailor's own ventures, which are limited to what they can stow in a sea chest on the poop. As far as I was able to discover -- and I was more than twelve months sailing in deep-sea dhows -- the freight from the dates, on the typical African voyage, is used to finance a cargo of salt from Aden and to purchase odds and ends which might earn a profit in the bazaars of the Benadir coast and Kenya Colony. At the same time, the dhow carries all the passengers she can prevail upon to make a voyage, anywhere, for the Arab of Oman, and the Hadhramaut in particular, is an inveterate wanderer, and every dhow is a passenger vessel by the mere possession of deck enough to lie upon.

MA
484

The salt is sold in the best market that offers between the Hadhramaut coast and Zanzibar. At the same time, the nakhoda does what trading he can in anything which he knows, from past experience, will command a market. The average dhow never leaves the Gulf without at least some carpets, allegedly Persian but generally of either Italian or English origin, which are used both as trade and as bribes. Cooking stones, ghee, live sheep, cows, sacks of rice and flour, dried fish, haberdashery of all sorts, brassware, cheap enamelware, Arab confectionery -- all these may be aboard, either as ship's ventures or as the crew's, generally the latter.

Every man of the crew concentrates on goods which can be bought cheaply in the free port of Aden, adulterated if possible in transit, and sold to the Somali or Swahili shopkeepers whose little stores abound in every port along the coast of East Africa, from Haifun in the north (which the Italians called Dante) to Mikindani in the south, which is about as far south as the Arabs sail in these days. Only Indian dhows go further, to Madagascar and the Comorin Islands. Gaily coloured turbans of the correct style

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs MK2

From the proceeds of the season's catch one-fifth is turned over to the owner of the boat as rent for its use, and from the remainder the season's expenses for food, water and the like are deducted. The money that is left represents the profits of the season. Each diver receives an equal share of this; each assistant two-thirds of a share. The captain, who has done no diving but has superintended the season's campaign, receives a diver's share, as does the sheikh of the town in some instances, this being the government tax upon the industry.

This seems a good system. In theory it could hardly be improved, but in practice it could hardly be worse. The divers cannot read or write, so they have no way of knowing whether or not their accounts are correctly kept. They may not assist in, or even witness, the process of sale, so they have not the slightest control over the captain, nor any means of protecting themselves from dishonesty on his part. The captain himself is between the upper and nether millstones, for the only way he can rent a diving boat is by promising to sell his pearls to the owner of that boat, and from this owner he may receive not over fifty per cent of their market price. Even this reduced price the divers do not receive undiminished, for the captain enriches himself privately at their expense before the sale is reported. Then as if matters were not bad enough, almost without exception the men are in their captain's debt, and remain so throughout their lives.

The fact that nearly all the divers are in debt is partly their own fault. When a man begins to dive, he could avoid borrowing money if he were at all determined to do so. The diving season lasts only five months at the outside, and the season's proceeds may be sufficient to live on for the whole year with economy and care. If they

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs Nk2

426 are not, work can be found to tide over the winter months.
466 That, however, is not the usual course of events. The boy who has five hundred *rupees* in his pocket for the first time in his life is eager to have a good time. Inside of a month or two all the money is gone. The captain encourages this procedure, and assures the boy that he will gladly lend him any amount desired. The one thing that the captain desires is to lend this new diver some money, and his zeal to make himself accommodating and friendly is sometimes quite ludicrous. With most of his new men, unfortunately, there is little difficulty. The season's proceeds are gone inside of a few weeks, and before the winter is over, the diver is in debt for an amount equal to the sum he earned, or quite possibly even greater.

The diver is now a slave for the rest of his life. It is probably easier for a negro slave on the Pirate Coast to escape than it is for a Bahrein diver to regain his freedom. As long as he is in debt he cannot change his employer, no matter how badly he is treated, nor can he leave the town except under bonds to return before the diving season begins. And he never will be able to get out of debt. He cannot read or write. There is no witness to the transactions that take place between the captain and himself. It is the recognized thing for divers to receive a loan of rice when the season begins, so that their families may have something to eat while the head of the house is away. The sum written into the books is regularly about fifty per cent greater than the market price of the rice. If necessary, entirely false entries are written in. The upshot of the matter is that these men never get out of debt, not one in a thousand of them. In seven years' residence in Bahrein, I have never yet met a diver

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs MK2

who had "escaped from the account book," as the Arabs put it.

The amount that a season's work brings in is now a matter of indifference. However great it may be, all that happens is that the sum is written to the diver's credit on the books, and he is given an advance when he asks for it and the captain is willing to allow it. There are certain times during the year when it is the custom to give these advances—the beginning and the close of the diving season and once or twice during the idle months. A good season means somewhat more liberal advances and a bad season smaller ones. The diver, however, is absolutely at the captain's mercy in all this. As a matter of fact he gets in ordinary years an amount that is sufficient for life, and a more comfortable life than that of the Bedouin. The diver's standards of life, however, are considerably below those of a date gardener in a good oasis. It is to the captain's interest, of course, to have his men more or less well fed and satisfied, and to have the glamour of pearl diving maintained so that others will be attracted to the work, so a great show is made of calculating the season's receipts and the rare man who is not in debt really does get a fairly liberal reward for the season's exhausting labor. The crucial point, of course, is the law that prevents a mistreated and dissatisfied diver from changing his employer or from changing his residence. The captain could afford to give his men an amount that would allow them a considerably better mode of life. Doubtless if public sentiment becomes too threatening, he will do so. The thing he will not do is to consent to any alteration of the law that at present delivers the debtor into his hands,

S: Harrison D-4 (1919-1924) 1924 MI Middle East
Maritime Arabs VI

466 body and soul. The one redeeming feature of the system
426 is that debts are not transmissible from father to son and theoretically each boy starts out with a clean slate, but too often the filial loyalty of the son is appealed to and he assumes his father's debts. This plan allows the old man to retire from his life of hardship. Nothing suits the captain better, for thus the boy is deprived of his only chance to keep free from the slavery that has bound his father.

466 But in spite of its financial drawbacks the work has a great fascination for the Arab, and this is largely because of its element of chance. The Oriental is an inveterate gambler, and the Arab is no exception. Some years the reward of an individual diver may be next to nothing. Another season he may make a thousand *rupees*, or about three hundred and fifty dollars. Over night the whole aspect of the season may change. A pearl worth fifty thousand *rupees* may be discovered at any time. The largest pearl sold locally during the past ten years brought one hundred and twenty thousand *rupees*. Arabs tell of boats whose divers have cleared over two thousand *rupees* or more in a season, but such mythical individuals are hard to find. It is far easier to find the man who has failed to make two *rupees*. However, to do the industry justice, such individuals are rare also. In fair seasons the average must lie somewhere between three hundred and seven hundred *rupees*, or one hundred to two hundred and fifty dollars.

465 At the end of the season the profit, such as it is, is re-
517 ported and the money divided. The divers each receive their share, and the assistants each two-thirds of a share. Men in debt receive a more or less liberal allowance, and the town is filled with rejoicing divers who have just re-